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TEXAS STATE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION.

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THE PROPER WORK OF THE ASSOCIATION.*

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The subject of my remarks upon this occasion is "The Uses of the Texas State Historical Association." There have been in the past two such associations instituted in the city of Austin, in which I participated, that failed to be continued in operation. It is to be hoped that this one has been organized under such circumstances as that it will be a permanent institution.

As declared in its constitution, "The objects of the Association shall be, in general, the promotion of historical studies; and, in particular, the discovery, collection, preservation, and publication of historical material, especially such as relates to Texas."

It is proper that the collection of the materials of history should not be confined exclusively to Texas, though they may be most important in forming a complete history of Texas. For being one of a number of associated States, in the same country, and under a common government, there will necessarily be subjects of a general character that will affect Texas in a way to become a part of its history, as well as those arising within its own territorial boundaries. Its objects are not so much to induce the writing of a connected and complete history as to furnish the facts for that object in the future. In a country like Texas, of a great diversity of conditions,

* President's Address, read before the Association at its first annual meeting, June 17, 1897.

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employments, and habits, it is beyond the capacity of one person to bring to view all the facts pertaining to each part of the country. Therefore, it is proper that there should be an association of persons, so situated as properly to co-operate in doing the work. Nor should their efforts be confined to literary and scientific subjects, but should embrace material developments and everything else that tends to form the habits, character, and actions of the people of every class and condition.

True history consists of a descriptive record of the people, their actions, and beliefs that prompt to action, in the whole range of human effort, during any given period and throughout a succession of periods of time up to the present. For the present is the matured product of the past, as every effect is the result of the contributory causes that produced it. One difficulty of our understanding the condition of things of the present time is the indefiniteness and generality of our information of the past, as well as of the present. For instance, we may look over our constitutions and statutory laws and inferentially learn that certain actions performed by some persons at certain times were by common sentiment deemed to be prejudicial to the good of society by the penal enactments of the time. And that other actions were performed at different times may be likewise inferentially learned by laws conferring the rights of person and property. Such information, so obtained, would be indefinite. So, too, the information about the past obtained from books of history, especially in a new country like Texas, is generally too indefinite to be entirely satisfactory; because such books for the most part give an account of the important actions of the government and of its changes, under the control of political parties, and of wars, and of institutions organized from time to time in obedience to public sentiment. Still, those accounts are usually of a very general character.

To illustrate the ideas sought here to be conveyed: We can learn from the laws and the public action of the government that a penitentiary was established in Texas at a certain time, and has since then been kept in operation. From those sources we would fail to learn what was the condition of things that created the public sentiment that caused it to be established, what have been the employment of the convicts, how they were confined and treated, and what has been its general result as a mode of punishment of crimes up

to the present time. All that would be its history as a part of the history of the country. We may learn from the laws and histories of Texas that Texas has had several state capitols, but they fail to inform us as to the reasons of its removal from one place to the other, what conveniences were afforded at each, what important events occurred in each, and especially the long struggle in the effort to keep it at Austin, together with a specific account of the steps taken for, and work performed in, the erection of the splendid granite capitol in which the State's offices are located, and the Legislature is held. This would bring to view a connected account of the subject from the early days of Texas, as a separate government, to the present time. A most abundant amount of the materials of history could be developed by an account being given in the same way, including the past reaching up to the present, of cities, towns, and counties of Texas. That of San Antonio and Bexar county would reach back into the last century, and the progress to its present large proportions would exhibit many remarkable events peculiar to itself, and numerous acts and characters of men, who have in various ways contributed to its growth and importance, who are unknown in general history, as well as those who are so known. The same in some degree may be said of Goliad and Nacogdoches, and Laredo and Ysleta. An account of Galveston, Velasco, Houston, San Augustine, Clarksville, and some other places, would reach back to an early part of this century. An account of Corpus Christi, Gonzales, Bastrop, Austin, Crockett, Palestine, Henderson, Marshall, Paris, Dallas, Sherman, and Fort Worth, would reach back within the first half of this century. Both before and after that time, numerous towns have been established, the founding and progress of which, in the regions of country in which they are situated, would furnish much material for history.

In addition to these partially local sources of historic material, there are many others, more general in their scope, that are available. Of such are waves of public sentiment that have passed over the country and moved the people to action, such as Know-Nothingism, Greenbackism, the Granger Lodges, the Alliances, the numerous fraternities, the labor unions, the spirit of combination in everything.

Whether they are permanent or ephemeral, the actions under

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them become facts of history, and leave their impress upon the people and the country.

Another prolific source is to be found in the immense growth of the objects of government, in the increase of its officers, its courts, its asylums, in its State frontier protection, its penitentiaries, its high schools of all grades, its system of new education in common schools, and in numerous other governmental affairs, whose operations and particular modes of proceedings, with their results, are but partially and generally indefinitely known now by the mass of people, an intelligible explanation of which would afford much data for history of the present.

There are existing subjects of a material and industrial character worthy of notice, such as the introduction and use of barbed wire and improved machinery, with their results upon production. The introduction and use of electricity as a power, and its probable extension and advantages. The use of water-power in machinery and irrigation; the extent of it in this State, and the manner in which it should be used when practicable, consistent with individual rights and the public good. The bicycle, its use and effects. Overflows of rivers, and the responsibility of governments to relieve the sufferers, who expose themselves to the danger of them with their persons and property. Storms, tornadoes, and cyclones, as they have prevailed in the different parts of Texas. Long drouths, with their causes and effects. Epidemics, and the quarantine in Texas. Prehistoric men and lower animals, their remains, and the evidences of their former existence in Texas. Mines and minerals, with their present development and probable extent in the future.

There are also subjects which may be considered, to some extent, speculative, that may furnish instructive studies for forming future sentiment, if properly presented. One of them is Paternalism in government, with the questions, what is it, to what extent has it entered the rule and operation of the government in Texas, to what extent can it be allowed to enter, consistently with personal liberty and the public good. Private corporations, their great increase in this State, and their effects. Life and fire insurances, and their effects. Municipal corporations, the reasons for their creation, and the extent of the powers permissible to be granted them by the state government, and the limitations of injurious action upon the citizens controlled by them. The state associations of teachers, of

the bar, and of officers, now being held annually, their origin and objects, with their results. The drummers, as a commercial institution, their origin and practice. Hypnotism, its proper and improper use. Amusements prevalent in the past and at present, with their effects on the social condition. Anecdotes, even, if properly presented and are illustrative of noble actions, important public transactions, or the characters of persons that have made themselves useful in life, may, and often do, enter into the general history of a country. Also, biographies of persons, of both men and women, in any sphere of life, whose conduct furnish a commendable example for the imitation of others, are instructive lessons in history.

Without further enumeration, it may be said that any and everything that the people do or think, that tends to form habits of life, or to build up prevailing institutions affecting society, constitute material for history, and may be properly presented to this Association as such.

It is not to be supposed, however, that this Association is designed to be made the arena of acrimonious discussions, or of personal criminations and recriminations of any kind. On the contrary, every contribution should, as is expected it will, assume a high tone of impartial philosophic exposition of every subject written and presented to it.

If this Association shall be perpetuated, with the full and efficient efforts of its members, until the materials for the past successive periods shall have been collected and brought up to the present time, then the work will be easy in bringing to light the annual occurrences of each year as time passes. When that is accomplished, and some able historian of the future shall undertake to present to the public the complete history of Texas, it will be found that his work will fill four or five large volumes, instead of one or two volumes, as we are now accustomed to see it presented.

In conclusion, it may be remarked that as the events of the past history of the country enter into and aid in giving shape to the condition of things existing at the present time, the study of history is important in all branches of learning as a help to understand the present. Still, "the world moves," and new elements of human thought and action are being added, day by day as time passes, to

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the already accumulated materials of history, which are difficult to be grasped and understood fully in their comprehensive details and significance by any one person. They constitute the proximate impulses to public and private conduct for the time, and their comprehension is of the first importance in every department of useful knowledge.

One of the greatest benefits that this Association can confer upon the country would be to cause the present state of things as they transpire to be developed intelligibly, so as to be generally understood.